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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

Vocabulary Readers

STORYTELLING AROUND THE WORLD

by Ruth Jacobs



Number of Words: 573

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STORYTELLING AROUND THE WORLD



by Ruth Jacobs

Strategy Focus

As you read, pause and **summarize** the storytelling traditions of different cultures.



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

BOSTON

Key Vocabulary

common room large room where people gather

hearth floor of a fireplace

kayak lightweight canoe that uses one paddle

mainland main part of a country or continent

phases changes that the moon or a planet goes through each month

sod grassy soil held together by roots

sparkling bright and shining

suspicious feeling that something is wrong

village small town

Word Teaser

Some people think I am the “heart” of a home. What am I? (Hint: Add an *h* to *heart*.)



Long ago, people gathered around the warmth of a **hearth** or campfire to tell stories. Some of the stories were simply entertaining. Others taught important lessons.

Today, storytellers around the world keep these old traditions alive.

Storytellers of the Frozen North

The Inuit (in-U-it) people have lived in the cold northern areas of North America for thousands of years. For much of that time, Inuit people lived in simple houses made with chunks of grassy soil called **sod**. In the summer, they used small boats called **kayaks** to travel or fish. In the winter, they moved off the **mainland** to hunt on the Arctic ice.



▲ An Inuit sod house



Storytelling has always been an important part of Inuit culture. The Inuit often gather in a large **common room** to tell tales. Many Inuit stories tell about people or creatures with amazing powers. Some explain natural events.



One Inuit story explains the different **phases** of the moon. According to this tale, the moon is always chasing the sun across the twinkling, **sparkling** night sky. As the moon races to catch the sun, it forgets to eat. It grows much thinner. Then it disappears for three days. During this time, the moon eats. When it returns to the sky, it gets bigger. Once it grows full, the chase starts over again!

Storytellers of West Africa

In West Africa, people called griots (GREE ohs) are the main storytellers. Griots use a combination of poetry and music to share African traditions and lessons.

Griots are very important members of the communities. They pass along the history of their small towns or villages. They often use a drum to tell or sing the histories of important families. Griots are known for having amazing memories. They may memorize the names and details of all the townspeople's ancestors.



▲ An African drum

▼ Dembo Jobarteh is a griot from West Africa.



It takes years for griots to learn the hundreds of stories and songs they are expected to know. So griots start to learn storytelling when they are children.

Griots also learn to play traditional music. The griots' style of music and storytelling has had an effect on modern music far away from Africa, such as the American blues.

Storytellers of Japan

In Japan, people have a tradition called “paper drama.” The storyteller uses pictures on large cards to tell a legend or folktale. The stories explain something in nature or teach a lesson.

One popular paper drama story is about an ogre, or monster. In it, an ogre meets an old man. The man tells the ogre that many people in his village have died. Giant waves washed them into the sea. When another storm approaches, the ogre rushes to the beach to keep more villagers from drowning. Then he gets swept out to sea.

The story explains how a large group of rocks ended up off the coast of Japan. People once believed that the rocks were the ogre. The story also tells about the importance of courage and giving to others.





Sometimes paper drama storytellers don't tell a whole story at once. They talk until they reach a very exciting part. Then they stop. They pack up their things and leave. The audience is a little **suspicious**. They sense that something is not quite right. But then the storytellers return another day. The children come running again. The story goes on!



Today paper drama storytellers are found in Japanese schools, libraries, and culture centers.

All over the world, storytelling is still going strong. Old traditions continue, and new ones are growing.

Responding

Putting Words to Work

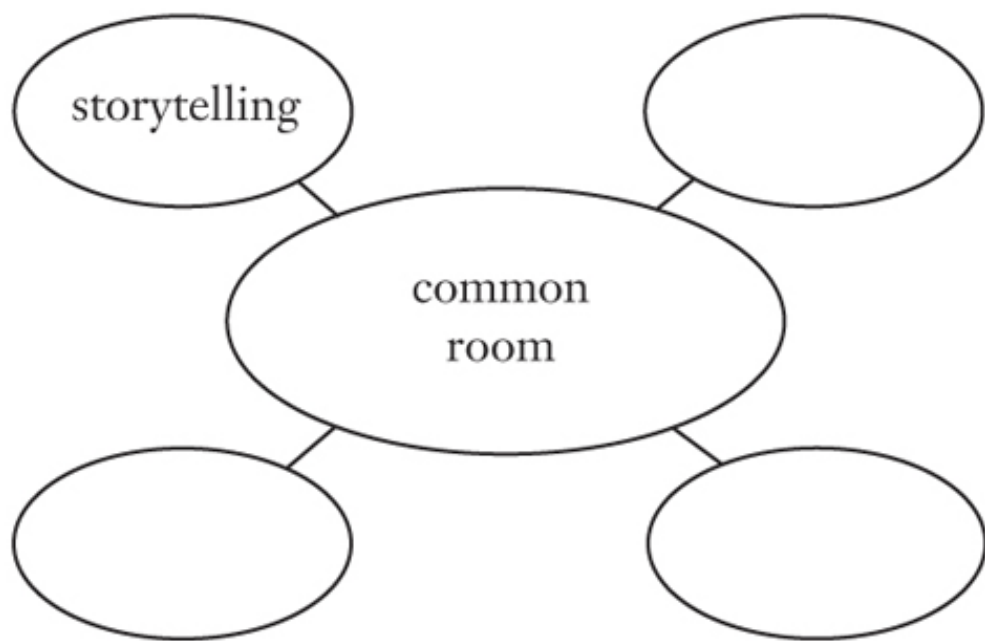
1. Why did people once gather around a **hearth** to hear stories?
2. Complete the following sentence:
He was always **suspicious** because _____.
3. Why do you think the Inuit made up stories to explain the moon's **phases**?
4. If you used a **kayak** to travel to the **mainland**, where would you probably be coming from?
5. **PARTNER ACTIVITY:** Think of a word you learned in the text. Explain its meaning to your partner and give an example.

Answer to Word Teaser

the **hearth**

Word Builder

In many cultures, people gather in a **common room** to tell stories. Copy this word web. Add other activities that might take place in a common room.



Write About It

Write a paragraph that describes a common room in your home, school, or community. Explain the kinds of activities that people do in this common room. Use some of the words from your Word Builder web in your paragraph.

Key Vocabulary

common room

hearth

kayak

mainland

phases

sod

sparkling

suspicious

village

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